

1 & 2 Peter: Faith Under Fire

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the
resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and
unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
(1 Peter 1:3-5 ESV)*

A Lamp Shining in a Dark Place

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2 Peter 1:16-21

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Introduction:

Good morning. Please turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Peter, chapter 1. You'll find that right near the end of your New Testament.

We saw in the text last week that Peter is mindful of his imminent death. Three times Peter writes in verses 12-15 his desire to REMIND his church of some truths that they are prone to forget. We are forgetful people, aren't we? So too was the early church.

What we have before us today is an urgent, pastoral reminder from the Apostle Peter. In his first letter he had been preparing the church for attacks from the outside. In 2 Peter we find preparations for attacks from the inside. People are going to rise up from within the church and they are going to say all kinds of ridiculous things. They're going to pander to your desires and – if we are not careful – they are going to lead you right out of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That's the crisis that Peter is writing to address. We are facing the same dangers today. Look with me at chapter 1, verse 16. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, trustworthy word to us today:

¹⁶For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him

by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,”¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:16-21 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God

As we look closely at Peter's letter, we come to discover some important details about the false teachers he is addressing. These are men who are within the church – meaning that they identified themselves as Christians. Hear that. These were people who called themselves Christians but who made it their mission to lead God's people to question the authority of the Apostles.

In particular, these false teachers were trying to convince the church to stop being so concerned about holiness. But in order to make their case, they needed to undermine the belief that Jesus was going to return to judge the living and the dead. If people believe that Jesus is coming back, then they're going to spend their lives responding in obedience to his word. So, if you're a false teacher and you want to release yourself from the restrictions that are found in the Bible, what do you do? What do you do when the Bible is shining a light on all of your error? You concoct a scheme to snuff out the lamp.

How to Snuff Out the Lamp

These false teachers are not unique to Peter's day. They are rampant in the church even now. They want to convince you that you can disobey the clear teaching of the Bible, but in order to do that they need to find a way to conceal their actions from the light of the Scriptures. Such teachers use a two-step process to snuff out the lamp. First, they:

1. Undermine New Testament apostles

We can find their objection when we consider Peter's response to it in verse 16:

For we did not follow **cleverly devised myths** when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:16a ESV)

Now, admittedly we're only hearing one half of the argument, but this gives us a pretty good idea of the accusation that the false teachers were throwing out, doesn't it?

It likely sounded something like this: "You mean to say that you trust the testimony of the apostles? They're just making up stories to try to solidify their power! They're devising myths to try to scare you into listening to them. These stories from the apostles are no different than the legends of Hercules and Zeus."

Does that sound familiar?

I run into that objection all the time when I'm trying to share the gospel with people. They lump Christianity in with every other religion and they lump the stories of the New Testament in with all of the other religious myths in the world and then they reject it all whole-sale. Not much has changed in 2000 years.

That's step one. Step two in snuffing out the lamp is to:

2. Question the trustworthiness of the Old Testament prophets

We see a glimpse of their argument in verses 20 – 21:

knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, (2 Peter 1:20-21a ESV)

It appears that these teachers were suggesting that the Old Testament prophets were merely giving their own interpretations of their visions, and these interpretations came – not from God – but from the will of the prophets. I suspect the argument went something like this:

“These apostles are basing all of their arguments in these Old Testament prophecies – but what if

the prophecies are wrong? Even if they DID receive visions from God, what makes us so sure that their interpretations of those visions are correct? They were fallible men just like us. How do we know that Isaiah wasn't simply trying to explain his visions from his own earthly understanding? Maybe David drank some sour goat's milk and had a weird dream! Are we really going to let these man-made, Old Testament prophecies from 1000 years ago dictate how we live today?"

That's the argument. When we put it all together, we can summarize the objections of these prophets like this:

"We can't trust the New Testament apostles, and we can't trust the Old Testament prophets, so we have no reason to believe that Jesus will come again in judgement. Therefore, we can live as we please!"

If their premises are correct, then their conclusion is also correct. If we can't trust the Bible – Old Testament and New – then we have no foundation for this faith that we hold. This is a faith-destroying argument that has often found its way into the church. It has left many former believers shipwrecked on the rocks of unbelief. You will face these objections at some point in your life, if you have not already, and so too will your children.

But, can I give you some encouragement church? Peter was not at all intimidated by their attempts to snuff out the lamp. In fact, Peter responds to these critics with a firm confidence the lamp will keep on shining bright. He responds to their assault by celebrating some of the fuel that keeps the lamp burning bright.

The Fuel that Keeps the Lamp Burning Bright

In Peter's first letter to the church, he argued:

but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, **always being prepared to make a defense** to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15 ESV)

Now, in his second letter, Peter very practically demonstrates what it looks like to make a defence for the hope that we have. He responds to these two attacks with two answers. First, he teaches us that the lamp burns bright because:

1. The Apostles were eye witnesses

We find this in verse 16:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. (2 Peter 1:16 ESV)

Peter replies: “MYTHS?! What do you mean myths?! We were there! We saw him with our own eyes and heard him with our own ears!” He goes on in verse 17:

For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,”¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. (2 Peter 1:17-18 ESV)

Peter is alluding here to the Transfiguration. By way of reminder, the Transfiguration refers to the time when Jesus brought his inner circle of disciples – Peter, James and John – up onto a hill for a time of prayer. As Jesus prayed, a cloud of glory descended upon him and Moses and Elijah appeared beside him. He began to shine in his appearance and God spoke from the cloud to the three disciples.

Here’s a question that I suspect you’ve never asked: Why does Peter highlight this story in his defence? He could have pointed to the time when the resurrected Christ walked into the upper room while the disciples were hiding out in prayer. He could have referenced the time that doubting Thomas placed his hand in the wound in Jesus’ side. Perhaps most glaringly, he could have referenced the Ascension when Jesus was taken up into heaven in his resurrected body.

But instead he points to the Transfiguration. Why is that?

One of the things that we are meant to see in in this story is God’s affirmation of Jesus as the

divine King whose coming is prophesied in Psalm 2. That psalm says:

“As for me, I have set my King
on Zion, **my holy hill.**”

⁷ I will tell of the decree:

The Lord said to me, “You are my Son; (Psalm 2:6-7 ESV)

Do you see that Peter is borrowing language from Psalm 2 in his retelling of this story? He is highlighting that Jesus is the prophesied King from Psalm 2! Here’s why that is significant: The false teachers were trying to undermine the authority of the apostles because they wanted to believe that they could live in sin with no fear of consequences. But Peter replies: “I am an eye-witness! And one of the things that I witnessed was the transfiguration where – on God’s holy hill – the God of Heaven and Earth spoke from the clouds and declared: “This is MY Son.” So you false teachers had better pay attention because Psalm 2 ends with an ominous warning:

¹¹ Serve the Lord with fear,
and rejoice with trembling.

¹² **Kiss the Son,
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,**
for his wrath is quickly kindled.

Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Psalm 2:11-12 ESV)

Jesus IS coming again! Every tongue WILL confess and every knee WILL bow! Peter knows this to be true because Peter looked at Jesus as he shone in glory on the mountaintop. Peter knows this because God SPOKE this to him from the heavens.

Just as in the psalm, Peter warns such people to make peace with the Son before he comes as Judge.¹

Disregarding the authority of the New Testament is a very big deal. Any teacher who tells you: “You don’t really need to listen to Peter here because...” or, “We can’t be sure that Paul wasn’t simply a man bound by his own cultural assumptions...” is a teacher that you need to run away from as quickly as you can. Every teacher who adopts such a stance does so to try to convince you that the commands of the apostolic letters don’t really apply to your life. That’s the pattern. It happened in Peter’s day, and it happens in ours as well. Don’t be deceived.

¹ Dick Lucas & Christopher Green, *The Bible Speaks Today (2 Peter & Jude)*, ed. John R. W. Stott, vol. 30. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 78.

Before we move on, I want to step away from the text and just add one more practical note.

Perhaps you're here today and you're thinking: "Okay, so the New Testament authors SAY that they should be trusted, but so what? I'm supposed to believe them just because they tell me to?"

That's a fair question, and a common one at that. Peter's readers were quick to trust him because they knew him. But you don't know him, so how are you supposed to trust that he's telling the truth?

We've been looking at *internal* evidence for the trustworthiness of the Scriptures, but there is a great deal of *external* evidence as well. Here's a question: How many people are willing to die for a lie that they know to be untrue?

The resurrected Jesus appeared to the disciples, and he later appeared to a crowd of 500 other witnesses. Either the disciples and 500 other witnesses saw the resurrected Christ, or the disciples and 500 other witnesses made a pact to lie to the world. Those are our two options.

Do you really believe that 500 people could maintain a lie? Even with no pressure, could 500 people really hold their pact to one another? And we know from historical evidence that there was **considerable** pressure placed on these witnesses. A great number of those 500 were tortured and murdered for that "lie". Peter himself would be crucified upside down shortly after writing this letter. If any one of those 500 people had confessed under pressure that the resurrection was just a lie that they had concocted, the spread of Christianity would have ceased, and we would not be having this discussion this morning. But every single one of them held fast to the truth of the resurrection even to the point of death. Lee Strobel notes:

People will die for their religious beliefs if they sincerely believe they are true, but people won't die for their religious beliefs if they know their beliefs are false.²

Or, as the Apostle Peter said it:

² Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 364.

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. (2 Peter 1:16 ESV)

The external and the internal evidence tell the same story: You can trust the New Testament witness. Now, back to the text.

Peter's final argument is this: The lamp burns bright because:

2. The Old Testament Prophets spoke from God

In verse 20 Peter wrote:

knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21 ESV)

Peter is telling us here that we can trust our Old Testaments too. Old Testament and New, the prophetic word is God-breathed and authoritative! The prophets weren't merely giving us their best attempts at understanding the divine mysteries – they spoke God's words as they were helped by the Holy Spirit. Thomas Schreiner is helpful in dissecting this verse for us. He writes:

Both human beings and God were fully involved in the process of inspiration. The personality and gifts of the human authors were not squelched or suppressed. We can detect their different literary styles even today. And yet the words they spoke do not cancel of the truth that they spoke the word of God.³

There will never be a shortage of false teachers who seek to undermine our confidence in the Old Testament. The threat is so severe that one world famous pastor recently encouraged his church to unhitch from the Old Testament.⁴ This pastor believes that the Old Testament is the word of God, but he noticed that many people fall away from the faith when false teachers undermine their faith in the Old Testament stories. His response: Unhitch from the Old Testament. Stop worrying about whether those prophecies are true and start worrying about whether or not Jesus is who he says he is.

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude, The New American Commentary*, vol. 37, 38 vols. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 324.

⁴ <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2018/may/christians-need-to-unhitch-the-old-testament-from-their-faith-andy-stanleys-sermon-draws-social-media-backlash> Accessed on Jan. 29, 2019.

With all due respect – that is really bad advice. And I can say that because it flies in the face of the advice that Peter offers here. This church is facing the threat of false teaching. This church is struggling with their confidence in the Old Testament prophecies. So, what does Peter say? Does he tell them to stop worrying about the Old Testament prophecies? Absolutely NOT! He calls on them to double down! When the Old Testament prophets spoke, God spoke! When the Old Testament prophets interpreted, God interpreted! And all of those Old Testament prophecies point directly to the Lord Jesus Christ. They anticipate his coming. They pave the way for our understanding. They are the lamps shining in the darkness, helping us to see in Christ what we are meant to see and, Peter tells us, we would do well to PAY ATTENTION!

So, don't unhitch from the Old Testament. Latch yourself on and refuse to let go. The Old Testament prophecies help us to see and delight in Christ. As the Apostle Paul said:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 ESV)

As we conclude this morning, I want to invite you to zoom in with me to verse 19:

And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, (2 Peter 1:19 ESV)

Peter tells us here that this light will not always be needed. One day the morning star will rise in our hearts – Christ will return – and we won't need the Scriptures anymore!

But, until that day, the word of God is our source of light. Christian, if you want to see yourself, your world, and your God as you should, then you need to the illuminating word of God. That's the response I think that this text calls for this morning:

Pay Attention to the Lamp Shining in a Dark Place

That's what Peter says in verse 19. Listen, we live in a very dark world. There are people who are

seeking to lead us into ruin. Worse, there are desires inside of us that are seeking to lead us into ruin. We are constantly being lured towards destruction. This wasn't just an early church problem. It is a problem that we will face until Christ returns. That's a sobering reality, isn't it?

The question is: Will you take the bait and exchange the truth of God for a lie? Or will you stand firm in the truth? Will you have enough light to see the traps that are being laid before you? Or are you willfully walking in darkness?

Peter is telling us here that the best way to position yourself to stand is to hold fast to the illuminating word of God – Old Testament and New. Trust in the New Testament Apostles. Trust in the Old Testament prophets.

To that end, I want to issue a two-fold challenge to you this morning. I want us to be a people who have light enough to see what God would have us see in this life. Therefore, I want to encourage you to:

1. Read Fast

What I mean by that is that I want to encourage you to make it a habit to read your whole Bible. Every book of the Bible is inspired. Every book of the Bible adds its own unique light to this lamp that God has entrusted to us. We encourage people to use the Robert Murry Mc'Cheyne reading plan here because it is a plan that has you reading the whole Bible in a year.

False teachers will try to trip you up by misinterpreting and disregarding the full counsel of the word of God. The best way to prepare yourself for that kind of deception is to immerse yourself in the full story of the Bible year after year. Read fast.

Second:

2. Read Slow

The challenge with reading fast is that it doesn't leave you with enough time to stop and to reflect. We are called to meditate – to reflect deeply on the word – and reflecting deeply takes

time. Some folks seem to talk as if we are forced into an either/or decision in this regard. Either we will read the whole bible, or we will spend the year meditating on ten verses.

But we need both! We need to block out time in our day to read slowly through a passage. We need to give ourselves time to stop and reflect on what God is saying to us. I confess that there have been seasons in my life when I neglected this habit. Bible reading became routine for me – something that I rushed through so that I could check off the box. That was a bad season for my soul. The Psalmist teaches us that we need to make time to meditate on the word:

for I find my delight in your commandments,
which I love.
⁴⁸ I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love,
and **I will meditate on your statutes.** (Psalm 119:47-48 ESV)

One of the ways that we can meditate on the scriptures is through memorization. If the word of God is a lamp that leads us through the dark, then we need to take that lamp with us as we march out into the dark world. We need to hide that light deep in our hearts so that we will be quick to spot the lies of the enemy when they are taught to us by false teachers.

To that end, I want to issue a challenge this morning:

I want to challenge you to pick a chapter of the Bible that stirs your soul and to make a plan to memorize that chapter. I was challenged by one of the young men at the main campus the other week and he told me that he has a little notebook and he writes the verse that he is hoping to memorize ten times, then he says it out loud ten times, and after that he simply reviews it once a day. He used this technique to memorize a whole book of the Bible with his sister!

We need to get the word into us and into our kids, because there are teachers who are actively seeking to draw us away from the faith. They tempt us by offering to satisfy our carnal desires. They assault our faith by attempting to undermine the authority of the apostles and the prophets. But, the more firmly we have taken hold of the truth of God's word, the more securely we will stand when these attacks come.

The word of God is a lamp shining in the darkness. It is trustworthy and true. And we will do

well to pay attention. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray.